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## Irony of Overstatement in the Satires of Juvenal

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In *The Satirist*, Leonard Feinberg offers a suggestive definition of satiric technique as a “*playfully critical distortion of the familiar*.”<sup>1</sup> This tactical approach to satire thus involves four interrelated parameters: by “playfulness” Feinberg means that wit and humor are essential to satiric discourse; “criticism” presupposes that the satirist rejects an established set of values in favor of another set which is not yet established, or (if he is a conservative) no longer in force, or perhaps only implicit in his thinking; “distortion” suggests that the fictions created by the satirist are bound to be unrealistic to some extent since it is the satirist’s purpose to induce a new sense of the real in his readers; finally, “the familiar” informs us that satire requires norms, at least as a point of departure. It is this fourth parameter, “the familiar,” which has often limited our understanding of individual satirists and satiric literature as a whole. We may regard as typical Gilbert Highet’s assertion that the subject matter of satire should be topical: that is, it should be directed toward the realia of contemporary life and name specific people, places, and actual events.<sup>2</sup> Though satire

<sup>1</sup> Ames, Iowa, 1963, 7 (the italics are his). I recognize a general debt to W. C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, 1974), whose analysis of irony—as complex and elusive a quality in literature as it is a difficult critical concept—is now the most sophisticated known to me; to T. Wymer, “The Swiftian Satire of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.,” in T. E. Clareson, *Voices for the Future* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), 238–262, for a model analysis of another “ironic exaggerator;” and to W. R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible* (Urbana, 1976), for a model analysis of “unreality” as a structural principle in literature. My critical views of parody are derived from G. D. Kiremidjian, “The Aesthetics of Parody,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28 (1970), 231–242.

<sup>2</sup> *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton, 1962), 16 f. For recent attempts to view Juvenal specifically as topical in this sense, see B. Baldwin, “Cover-Names and Dead Victims in Juvenal,” *Athenaeum* 45 (1967), 304–312; U. Knoche, “Juvenals Maßstäbe der Gesell-

certainly can be topical and realistic in this direct way, I believe that "the familiar" against which a satirist reacts comprehends a much broader and more imaginative range of possibilities than this.

By now it should be axiomatic that Juvenal is one great satirist whose effectiveness cannot be ascribed to topicality or contemporaneity in Highet's sense. K. H. Waters and G. B. Townend are two important scholars who recently have insisted that the center-focus of Juvenal's imagination is late Flavian society, and that it is this era, already part of Roman history, which provides the satirist with his major characters and events.<sup>3</sup> We simply do not learn many facts, if any, about Trajanic or Hadrianic society from reading Juvenal, yet the poems seem to have been published under two later Emperors, if we may trust the reconstructions of our best scholars.<sup>4</sup>

This recent trend in scholarship is valuable mainly for directing our attention to areas other than immediate topicality in order to discover the sources of Juvenal's satiric power and vitality. Like other satirists, Juvenal is dependent on the conventions and institutions of his culture as a point of departure for his peculiar kind of communication, but this basis in "the familiar" goes far beyond those topical considerations which have too often been the sole domain of critical investigation. First, there is earlier literature: Roman satiric traditions, the epic genre in general, and Vergil, Ovid, and Martial in particular are all fundamental to Juvenal's imagination and the verbal means of expressing that imagination.<sup>5</sup> Second, there is moral philosophy, the younger Seneca's in particular, though Juvenal

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schaftskritik," in W. Hering (ed.), *Römische Satire (Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock* 15, 1966), 453-462; P. Green, "Juvenal and His Age," in *The Shadows of the Parthenon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), 216-267. Of course, G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford, 1954), remains the paradigmatic reading of Juvenal's works for possible topicality, though Highet's many contributions to Juvenalian scholarship cannot be reduced to this alone.

<sup>3</sup> K. H. Waters, "Juvenal and the Reign of Trajan," *Antichthon* 4 (1970), 62-77; G. B. Townend, "The Literary Substrata to Juvenal's Satires," *JRS* 63 (1973), 148-160. For an important background study, cf. K. H. Waters, "Traianus Domitiani Continuator," *AJP* 90 (1969), 385-405.

<sup>4</sup> For the standard view see Highet, *Juvenal* (above, note 2), 10-17, and cf. M. Coffey, "Juvenal 1941-1961," *Lustrum* 8 (1964), 165-170, and, more recently, Waters, "Juvenal" (above, note 3).

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Townend (above, note 3), see R. E. Colton, *Juvenal and Martial* (Diss., Columbia Univ., 1959); W. S. Anderson, "Roman Satirists and Their Tradition," *Satire Newsletter* 1 (1963), 1-5, and "Lascivia vs. Ira: Martial and Juvenal," *CSCA* 3 (1970), 1-34; G. Highet, "Juvenal's Bookcase," *AJP* 72 (1957), 369-394; E. Thomas, "Some Aspects of Ovidian Influence on Juvenal," *Orpheus* 7 (1960), 35-44.

really reacts to the entire system of intellectual and moral clichés that underlie contemporary moral philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Third, there is also the old Greek mythology, which is supposedly rejected in the satirist's apology in the First Satire, but which is fundamental to his imagination throughout the satires.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, there is the all-encompassing field of rhetoric, which has long been a major focus of scholarly research, with basic studies by Josué De Decker and Inez Scott-Ryberg.<sup>8</sup>

What is significant in Juvenal's technique is that he simultaneously exploits and satirizes each of these cultural forms just mentioned. Or, rather, we would do better to refer to them not merely as cultural forms nor merely as modes of discourse, but—in terms of their functions in Juvenal's works—as the essential forms of imagination available to contemporary society. Juvenal succeeds, not by avoiding these various sterile forms which were to become even more ossified in the second century, but by working through them to provide such outrageously exaggerated pictures that we cannot take the forms seriously any longer. We must call into question the nature and limits of intellectual forms whose potential Juvenal elaborates to the point of making their unreality obvious and explicit. However, we cannot embark on such speculations about Juvenal's art unless we are willing to look at him from a perspective which is the opposite of the conventional one. That is, we have to recognize from the outset of our investigation that *the satirist is no believer*.

In the area of rhetoric, the scholarship has long been led astray by the manuscript *vitae*, which assert that until middle age Juvenal practiced declamation as a personal interest, and by the one reference in the First Satire (15) that the satirist had experienced the regular school training in rhetoric. Yet there are more telling expressions of Juvenal's real attitude toward the suffocating effect of rhetoric on contemporary culture: his ridicule of the famous Quintilian in the Sixth (75 and 280) and Seventh Satires (186–198), his deflation of the reputation of Hannibal in Satire 10 (166 f.) by remarking that the whole majestic career of the great general is reducible to a schoolboy's declamation, and the joke in the Fifteenth

<sup>6</sup> W. S. Anderson, "Anger in Juvenal and Seneca," *UCPCPh* 19 (1964), 127–196; B. F. Dick, "Seneca and Juvenal 10," *HSCP* (1969), 237–246; C. Lutz, "Democritus and Heraclitus," *CJ* 49 (1953–1954), 309–314.

<sup>7</sup> J. C. Bramble, *Persius and the Programmatic Satire* (Cambridge, 1974), 12 f.

<sup>8</sup> J. De Decker, *Juvenalis Declamans* (Ghent, 1913), and I. G. Scott [-Ryberg], *The Grand Style in the Satires of Juvenal* (*Smith College Classical Studies* 8, 1927). Cf. E. J. Kenney, "Juvenal: Satirist or Rhetorician?," *Latomus* 22 (1963), 704–720, and W. S. Anderson, "Juvenal and Quintilian," *YCS* 17 (1961), 3–93.

Satire (112) that the world has become so corrupt that even the fanciful land of Thule now has its own schoolmaster of rhetoric.

We must also approach mythology with a similar awareness. Ovid had already demystified mythical narrative in the *Metamorphoses*, revealing that myths were the creative universe of the story-teller and his art.<sup>9</sup> Juvenal definitely shows a preference for the *Metamorphoses*, not only for the substance of his mythological allusions throughout every satire, but also for the spirit in which he treats myth. Thus in the longer myths of Satires 1 (Deucalion and Pyrrha), 3 (which assumes the overall, "archetypal" structure of the myth of degeneration from the Golden Age),<sup>10</sup> and 6 and 13 (Golden Age), Juvenal establishes a contrast between contemporary reality and the mythical, divine, and heroic past, which is doubly ironic because neither present nor past is idealized.<sup>11</sup>

We know, for example, that Juvenal is not being serious about the myth of *Saturnia regna* in Satire 13 (38-52) when he says Juno was just "a little maid" and Jupiter was still only a "private citizen." But the satirist goes further than this when he embarks on a remarkable series of *negative exempla*: "There was no banquet of heaven-dwellers up in the clouds, no boy from Ilium, nor Hercules' lovely wife by the cups, nor Vulcan, after slurping down the nectar, scrubbing his arms black from his Liparian smithy (*taberna*, 45, here a comic anachronism); each god dined by himself, and there wasn't a crowd of deities as there is today; and the stars, happy with a few divinities, crushed poor Atlas with a lesser weight; not yet had fierce Pluto and his Sicilian wife been allotted the gloomy empire of the lowest abyss, nor was there the wheel [of Ixion], nor Furies, nor the rock [of Sisyphus], nor the punishment of the black vulture [for Tityus] (42-51)." Ironically, what made the Golden Age golden was the very fact that there weren't so many gods! Yet this passage must also be juxtaposed with an analogous catalogue, later in the same poem (75-85): men will take an oath by just about every religious relic (and many in this list are incredibly exotic), and even by the whole "arsenal of heaven," because

<sup>9</sup> C. Altieri, "Ovid and the New Mythologists," *Novel* 7 (1973), 31-40; G. K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975), 28 f. and 235.

<sup>10</sup> A. L. Motto and J. R. Clark, "Per iter tenebricosum: The Mythos of Juvenal 3," *TAPA* 96 (1965), 267-276. Cf. S. C. Fredericks, "Daedalus in Juvenal's Third Satire," *CB* 49 (1972), 11-13.

<sup>11</sup> This point has been raised often enough. See S. C. Fredericks, "Juvenal's Fifteenth Satire," *ICS* 1 (1976), 189 and note 32 (for cross-references to the work of M. Morford and D. Wiesen), and, earlier, "Calvinus in Juvenal's Thirteenth Satire," *Arethusa* 4 (1971), 219 f. and 229, notes 7 and 8.

they know they cannot be held accountable unless there are *human* witnesses. There is a serious message to be gained from the satirist's comic exaggerations: men who are willing to worship anything, as Juvenal says his contemporaries do, really hold nothing sacred. But this is just one of his many studied overstatements in the satires to the effect that quantity has displaced quality in Roman society.

Juvenal manifests the same scepticism toward the other two imaginative forms mentioned earlier. Thus in Satire 2, Juvenal can ridicule Stoicism, not for its intrinsic worthlessness as a moral philosophy, but because it is just another massive deception in a society already mired in pretense and artificiality. Perhaps we expect Juvenal to treat the sacred cow of literature more gently, but that is not what he does in either the First or Seventh Satires, whose attacks against the sterility of contemporary literary art are obvious and elaborate. What could be more explicit than this sarcastic image in the Seventh Satire: "Nevertheless, we still keep at this (poetry); we keep turning our plows in the meager dust, and keep overturning the shoreline with sterile plowshares (48 f.)."<sup>12</sup> The reference to a *poetica tempestas* in the Twelfth Satire (23 f.) is another recognition by Juvenal of the unreality of much poetic discourse, especially epic.

We therefore must now approach Juvenalian satire with a much expanded awareness of what constitutes the object of his attacks. Even when he appears to deal most directly with contemporary social givens, actually he is often providing exaggerated counter-structures to current Roman cultural "myths," especially those related to literary conventions and traditions. In Satire 2, to counter the Roman mythology of virility and manliness and martial virtue, particularly elaborated in Silver Age epic, Juvenal gives us a contrived epic travesty about the total effeminacy of an entire culture's males. To correspond to the overly pious and traditional view of Roman woman, paraded in Statius' *Silvae* and elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> Juvenal gives us an equally exaggerated portrait of female *impudicitia* and *luxuria* in Satire 6. Satire 5 (based on the conventional *cena*-theme) exposes the complete impossibility of the traditional patron-client relationship, a social structure hopelessly perverted by a mean, vicious patron like Virro, but also perverted by a decadent, servile client like Trebius.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ironically, "plowing the shoreline" as a metaphor for the pursuit of a useless task is still another literary commonplace exploited by Juvenal opportunistically. For a list of occurrences, see J. D. Duff's commentary (ed. M. Coffey, Cambridge, 1970), ad 1.157.

<sup>13</sup> See D. W. T. C. Vessey, "Statius to His Wife: *Silvae* III.5," *CJ* 72 (1976-1977), 134-140.

<sup>14</sup> For the views expressed in this paragraph, I admit my debt to W. S. Anderson, "Studies in Book I of Juvenal," *YCS* 15 (1957), 33-90, and "Juvenal 6: A Problem in Structure," *CP* 51 (1956), 73-94.

Satire 4 is an analogous case. Highet has argued persuasively that Juvenal is parodying a court epic by Statius,<sup>15</sup> but even without relying on his special way of looking at the poem we still have the effusive praise of Domitian in Statius' *Silvae* and in several epigrams of Martial.<sup>16</sup> The demonic portrait of the emperor sketched by the satirist is therefore an inversion—of equal degree in the opposite direction—of his image as “dominus et deus” in literature (e.g., Martial 5.8.1) while alive. The satire is therefore just as much an indirect attack against the perversion of literature and thought as it is direct satire against the deceased Princesps. In other words, what actually constitutes “the familiar” in this poem is the world of Imperial poetic propaganda, whose pretentiousness and artificiality, masking murderous viciousness, are properly deflated by Juvenal's inflated and travestied portrayal of a solemn meeting of the ministers of state on the matter of a large fish caught recently in the Adriatic.

Hence, we should now consider that Juvenal's art can be “contemporary” or “topical” in an extended sense because it so often reacts to the contemporary Roman *imagination*—its modes of expression, its norms and conventions, in particular those which reflect a long and obvious tradition (and might therefore seem even the more inadequate for contemporary needs). In Juvenal's first two books, satire against this intellectual framework of conventional and traditional ideas is mostly indirect. In these six poems Juvenal presents his arguments against contemporary life through vivid and indignant attacks couched in his own voice—this mode of presentation commonly being referred to as a “persona” in satire scholarship<sup>17</sup>—or in barely disguised versions of that indignant voice, like Laronia in Satire 2, or Umbricius in 3. However, what is exposed in addition in these poems is the futility of reactionary Romanism, insofar as the desire for the “old ways”—for all of its emotional satisfaction—is *irrational* and impossible in a contemporary context. Perhaps this much indicates only that the traditional Roman system of values has become senile; yet there is further evidence that, beneath his apparent nostalgia for a lost age of idealism, there is a deeper self-awareness on the part of the satirist that his fiery vehemence is acutely decadent. I refer specifically

<sup>15</sup> *Juvenal* (above, note 2), 256, note 1.

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the very full listing of passages in Highet, *Juvenal* (above, note 2), 256–262, see the discussion in K. Scott, *The Imperial Cult Under the Flavians* (Stuttgart, 1936), 88–125.

<sup>17</sup> On this concept in satire criticism—in addition to the works of W. S. Anderson and S. C. Fredericks cited throughout these notes—see “The Concept of Persona in Satire, A Symposium,” *Satire Newsletter* 3 (1966), 89–153. G. Highet, “Masks and Faces in Satire,” *Hermes* 102 (1974), 321–337, remains the most outspoken opponent of the *persona*-theory.

to the highly stylized, polished, and self-conscious rhetorical cast of the first six poems. This is certainly no mark against Juvenal's wit or creativity, but it does suggest another dimension by which the *laudator temporis acti* exposes his own artifice.<sup>18</sup> We share with the satirist the realization that what we have before us achieves its ultimately serious purposes only through the indirect route of artful play.

The prologue to the Third Satire provides one of the most obvious and effective examples of the kind of wit generated by playful, self-effacing overstatement. Here the satirist emphasizes his horror of Rome in a crescendo of terrors, from fires to "constant" (*adsiduos*, 8) collapses of buildings, to the "thousand perils of the savage city (8 f.)," only to cap his series with a deflationary anti-climax, "and poets reciting in the month August." We know that this item has been included in the wrong kind of list, that Juvenal is not being serious at this specific point (though we cannot generalize from this that he is not being serious elsewhere in the poem, nor that his wit cannot have a serious function), that fear of sitting through a hot, stuffy recitation should not be included in a list with real terrifying catastrophes. The inclusivity is momentarily appealing through sheer perverseness, through its following out of the logic of overstatement already begun in the list of real terrors (as in the emotionally charged words *horre* and *saevae*), but it finally ends up by pointing to its own unreality. Though catalogues and lists are often evidence of a satirist at work, and are one of the typical satiric techniques for the distortions mentioned by Feinberg, they are particularly well suited to Juvenal's technique of creating vivid overstatements to violate our sense of the familiar.

Such sophisticated "showpieces" as this indicate that Juvenal is no simple conservative moralist, as if he naively and nostalgically fantasizes that his society could ever return to the glory, freedom, and creativity supposedly the possession of the great days of the Roman Republic. Like Petronius before him and like his great contemporary, Tacitus, Juvenal sees that contemporary reality involves a two-fold hypocrisy. On the one side, the facts of recent Roman history were unmistakable: this world was indeed dominated by the highly artificial pursuit of money and the power represented by it. Direct satire against this parvenu culture (e.g., wealthy Greeks and freedmen in Satire 3) is an obvious feature of Juvenalian satire. On the other, possibly under the continued influence of the Augustan *renovatio*—which constituted a peculiar Roman cultural myth dominant in the early Principate—there was a second and conservative intellectual layer by means of which contemporary Romans could believe they were

<sup>18</sup> See Anderson, "Anger" (above, note 6), 127 and 131-135.

still part of the great traditions of the Republic and its ancient institutions.<sup>19</sup> It is Juvenal's indirect satire against this anachronistic moral code that W. S. Anderson and other exponents of the *persona*-theory have brought to our fuller awareness in recent years. Indeed, among the "familiar" givens of Juvenal's world we must also include *mos maiorum* and the *laudator temporis acti*, whose futility is implicitly explored in Books 1 and 2. Overall, therefore, Juvenal is a satirist of the "double irony" in these first six poems:<sup>20</sup> he would have us reject both contemporary decadence and archaic pseudo-morality.

Since Gilbert Highet's study, scholarship has generally recognized that Book 3 begins a new phase for the satirist, since he no longer emphasizes an angry *persona* whose overstated beliefs and excessive indignation are a means of critical self-exposure (as, e.g., paradoxically, the enraged Umbrius of Satire 3 seeks to escape Greek-ridden Rome by migrating to Greek Cumae). Instead, many of these later poems involve various forms of imaginative (especially literary) decadence and sterility as the primary object of satiric attack. I believe, however, that Juvenal's most explicit and self-conscious statement that his poetry deals with the failure of the human imagination comes in his Tenth Satire, the classic on "The Vanity of Human Wishes," which we have too long read with an emphasis on vanity and without enough attention to *wishes*.

The first detailed elaboration of men's misconceptions about what is good for them is the Sejanus-episode (56-81). There is no question that the Emperor Tiberius' infamous praetorian prefect serves Juvenal's portrayal of the first vicious desire explored in the poem, which is ambition for political power at any cost. This theme is announced at once by the word *potentia* (56). But what is more remarkable is that Juvenal does not describe Sejanus himself until line 67. It is the *public image* of Sejanus that he ridicules: first in an outrageous description of the destruction of the erstwhile master politician's statue of himself done up in a triumphal chariot (58-60), which ends with Juvenal ludicrously expressing sympathy only for the "innocent horses," whose legs are shattered by the hammer.

<sup>19</sup> In addition to Ronald Syme's classic *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), the most valuable background study is H. W. Litchfield, "National *Exempla Virtutis* in Roman Literature," *HSCP* 25 (1914), 1-77.

<sup>20</sup> For the expression, "double irony," a common satiric technique by means of which "two equally invalid points of view cancel each other out," see Booth (above, note 1), 62 Wymer (above, note 1), 239 f., refers to this phenomenon as "the problem of secondary irony," and distinguishes these direct and indirect levels of satire as "thesis" and "anti-thesis" layers, respectively. R. C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire* (Princeton, 1960), provides an analogous approach with his idea of "the satirist satirized."



The pretentiousness of Sejanus' "public relations" image is justifiably deflated by the colloquial word for horses, *caballis*, "nags." Then we get a picture of metal statues being melted down in the forge, and what were once grand and fine displays of one's own power have now been turned into "water jars, basins, a skillet, and piss pots (64)." But at last we do see Sejanus—being led by the hook to the Gemonian steps. Now is when he will be seen (*spectandus*, 67), in the real flesh of a corpse, not in the artificial "public relations" forms of marble and bronze; Juvenal lets us know those are gone before the *corpus delicti* is.

The incredible swiftness of Sejanus' fall is reinforced by one of Juvenal's more memorable epigrams, which tells how it happened: *verbosa et grandis epistula venit | a Capreis* (71 f.). From the inflated expression "wordy and pretentious" we descend to the realization that it was only a letter which brought seemingly so great a man so low, so quickly. This is what justifies Juvenal turning in subsequent lines to the fickleness of the mob, disposed to believe in the power of the goddess Fortuna: for if events had by chance gone the other way, they would have been ready to accept Sejanus, just as slavishly, as their emperor. Hence, Juvenal's sarcastic expression, *turba Remi* (73), "Remus' crowd," is certainly justified to emphasize the cowardly (*anxius*, 80) loser-mentality of the Roman *populus*—quick to cringe or condemn, depending on shifting political winds in the imperial court, yet slavishly worshipping these same power-figures (in their ultimate daydreams for like powers), before settling for the dole of their "bread and circuses."

Later in the same poem Juvenal turns to famous generals and conquerors in world history, and certainly there is explicit, direct satire against the *reputations* of men like Xerxes, Alexander, and Hannibal (133–187). There are, however, two suggestions in this passage that Juvenal is doing something more than this. His Hannibal is described like some overpowering natural force: ". . . he leaps across the Pyrenees; nature sets the snowy Alps in his path, but he tears the cliffs apart and shatters the mountains with vinegar (153)." Although Juvenal borrows this detail about Hannibal's use of vinegar to break up blocked mountain passages from Livy's description (21.37.2), he exaggerates it by the use of overly graphic verbs, *diducit* and *rumpit*. After the chiasmic word order of *diducit scopulos et montem rumpit* the final word in the hexameter, *aceto*, which goes with both preceding clauses, must come both as a surprise and as a deflation of the epic grandeur of the previous words.

Juvenal makes the feats of conquerors even more incredible—and more explicitly so—in a later reference, to Xerxes: "men believe that once upon a time ships sailed through Mount Athos [*velificatus*, 174, an instance of

overly pompous diction] and whatever else that lying nation of Greece is bold enough to tell in history, that the sea was paved with those same Persian ships and set as a solid track beneath chariot wheels; we believe that deep rivers went dry and streams were drunk away by the foraging Mede, and all the rest of what Sostratus sings with drenched wings (173-178)." The satirist continues for some time in this same vein, even naming the sea "Ennosigaeus," "Earthshaker," a far-fetched application of Poseidon's Homeric epithet as a metonymy for the sea, and finally, Xerxes, too, is deflated by the ignominious realities of his defeat by the Greeks. However, what is perhaps just as important in this *exemplum* is that Juvenal's exaggeration of Herodotus (to be sure, mediated through the otherwise unattested epic poetaster, Sostratus) corresponds to his earlier exaggeration of Livy's words on Hannibal. The satirist's emphasis on the verbs *creditur* (173) and *credimus* (176) is intended to develop a larger dimension to his satire, to deliberately render the general's successes incredible and unrealistic, and consequently to deflate the power-fantasies and wish-fulfillments of his contemporaries. Juvenal thus ridicules people who believe in the Hannibals and Xerxes of this world.

Another illustration of this same function of exaggeration is one of the most brilliantly sustained exercises in irreverence in ancient literature. I refer to the repulsive description of old age in this same Tenth Satire (188-239). Juvenal starts with physical deformity, and after a blunt insistence on its sheer bodily ugliness, the opening lines are capped by a hilariously overlong and pretentious simile of two verses, which describes wrinkles on the elderly as like those which "a mother ape scratches on her ancient cheek where Numidian Thabraca extends shade-bearing glades (194 f.)." Then we turn to a list of specific physical infirmities (198-200, 203 f.), capped here by a vivid, obscene description of sexual impotence (204-207). From here the argument takes an abrupt turn to describe all the pleasures the elderly are incapable of feeling—starting from the sexual (208-212), then portraying the hopeless limits imposed on the hard of hearing (213-216). Next Juvenal leaps to still another semantic order—claiming that the elderly are plagued by such a race of illnesses that he could sooner count the adulterous lovers of the infamous Oppia, the number of victims accounted for in just one season by the doctor Themison, the number of business partners cheated by one man, wards cheated by still another, the number of sexual victims exhausted by a famous prostitute, and finally—with an obscene capping—the number of pupils seduced by a teacher (219-224). And we are surely on safe ground in spotting in Juvenal's comparison between illnesses on the one side and classes of vices on the other a non-serious mode of exaggeration through incongruity.

After this one inverted and ironic departure from the physical effects of old age (let us call it a catalogue within a catalogue), Juvenal returns again to listing physical infirmities: of shoulder, loins, hips (227). Then second childhood is described, culminating in another grotesque simile, parallel to the earlier one on the Numidian ape (229–232), comparing the old man's helplessness in acquiring food to the actions of a swallow's chick. Finally, in rapid order come true senility, lapses in memory, total forgetfulness, terminating in a will which ends up in the possession of a mistress (an ex-prostitute besides!) who was acquired late in life.

Except for the ironic comparison between numbers of illnesses and numbers of vices as a way of overstating them both non-seriously, the passage is an accumulation of physical defects. The emphasis is on the natural and the physical, and any *single* incident is reasonable in the elderly: it is only the total portrait, working through strained epic diction, which seems so overdone as to be distorted. This is why Juvenal emphasizes lists and catalogues of infirmities which are physical and natural—to point out the quantity of things that can go wrong as a shocking counter-structure to those who would again substitute quantity of life (*spatium vitae*, 188) for quality of life. These grotesque, sensual, physical deformities are therefore accumulated into one intensely exaggerated list, in order to deflate empty wish-fulfillments. As a composite or unified conception judged for atmosphere, the description of the horrors of old age is clearly unrealistic, an exaggeration, but its *function* is certainly realistic: to jolt men out of unrealistic wishes that old age will somehow prove an attainable ideal—old age is attainable all right, Juvenal says, but it is no ideal.

Juvenal maintains this same emphasis on the physical and natural in the attack on “beauty” or *forma* (289–345), which here bears a reductive meaning of sexual attractiveness. To counter this wish-fulfillment, at one point Juvenal brings his reader back to reality with the threat of castration—a permanent and absolute impairment of the natural human capacity for sex—because of the large market for sexually attractive eunuch lovers. Juvenal here thus shows more than a flair for exaggeration; he has a way of deflating extravagance with an appropriate tactic. Castration is introduced into the argument not so that Juvenal can just be obscene or titillating, but to raise a disturbing counter-fantasy to the over-commitment by Juvenal's contemporaries to unrealistic wishes for sexual powers.

The preceding observations about exaggeration apply more generally than to one poem. The Twelfth Satire, for instance, shares many features with the Tenth, but until recently it has been so universally condemned as a failure that its meaning and structure could not expect much except

to be misunderstood. It is not to my purpose in this paper to reinstate the poem as a work of art,<sup>21</sup> but only to make the local observation that with Juvenal's elaborate description of *captatio* or "legacy-hunting" (83-130) we are certainly entering an atmosphere of overstatement. A climactic order is presupposed.

First, legacy hunters would sacrifice a whole hecatomb of elephants (hence, an exaggerated number of beasts of exaggerated proportions for a sacrifice), except that the only herd belongs to Caesar. Another feature of overstatement is the list of famous generals who were borne by the elephants into battle: Hannibal, Pyrrhus (who is identified by an epic periphrasis, 108), and Roman generals; and finally we see the elephant carrying whole cohorts on its back (with this we are sure the exaggeration is ironic). The elephant is also called "a tower going into battle" (*turrem*, 110, here an amphibology, since *turris* is the normal Latin word for the howdah on the back of an elephant). Hence, individual details only heighten our awareness of the general idea of exaggeration, inherent in sacrificing a whole hecatomb of something as large, rare, and expensive as an elephant.

But this particular climactic arrangement starts out high and gets higher progressively, for after elephants we are told that legacy hunters would even turn to human sacrifice, first a "herd" of slaves (sarcastic use of *grex*, 116), then even one's own daughter, if necessary, as Agamemnon did with Iphigenia. Once again, Juvenal has chosen for his most overstated and unrealistic *exemplum* to cap the series with a *literary* one (I assume that *tragicae* in 120 directs us to think of tragedy specifically, and not myth or epic in general).

Again, this tremendously unrealistic series of exaggerations is not intended to give us a realistic portrayal of *captatio*, but to expose the increasing falseness and sterility which such artificial social institutions were producing to the detriment of true feelings between friends. *Captatio* is even worse than the pretense that one is after another's money through the illusion of friendship, because it also involves a ridiculous and fantastic overevaluation of the rewards involved ("Nor do I compare a thousand ships to an inheritance," 121 f., as Juvenal ironically puts it). In other words, *captatio* is not simply a moral vice for Juvenal, since his portrayal of its effect on the human *imagination* shows its true outrageous colors. It is the total perversion of the simple human capacity to evaluate what is

<sup>21</sup> My colleague E. S. Ramage accomplishes that purpose in "Juvenal, Satire 12: On Friendship True and False," *Illinois Classical Studies* 3 (1978), 221-237, to whom I owe a debt for several of my ideas about this poem.

worth doing that Juvenal is exploring in this passage and, in general, in this fourth book of satires. In the Twelfth, as in the Tenth Satire, his exaggerations point out that contemporary men are wasting their time and effort on the wrong goals.

But it is now appropriate to turn back from these analyses of the satirist's violent overstatements which contain ironic layers of meaning to Satire 1, his first statement of the purpose of his art. I refer specifically to the satirist's self-stated program of replacing the cliché-ridden epics and dramas prevalent in his own age with satire on the grand scale: a satire whose excesses are to mirror the extravagant excesses and perversions of contemporary life, and will for that reason be a "realistic" literature, since in its vices, and only in its vices, can contemporary Rome match the heroic scale of legendary epic. But at the end of his poem (147-171), Juvenal seemingly turns aside from this program, responds to an imaginary *adversarius*,<sup>22</sup> and admits that a satirist cannot really write about actual contemporary life, since punishment is sure to be meted out by those in power.

It has troubled critics that Juvenal not only concedes his *adversarius*' point, but caps his poem with the specific concession that he will direct his satire against those "whose ashes are covered by the Flaminian and Latin Ways (171)." Duff assumed this reference to the tombs of the wealthy and influential was a way for Juvenal to say his satire was directed against the aristocracy. But in addition this admission describes the actual historical (at least, "Domitianic") environment of his poems.

Further, there is some implication that Juvenal's insistence on the futility of literature in this and the Seventh Satire involved him in an ironic attitude toward his own artistic products. This is something more than the view that literature was a failure in his age. It is also the satirist's self-critical awareness that his own satire was also doomed to inadequacy. Satire would not reform an age simultaneously decadent in ideas, literature, and politics; an age decadent in two dimensions—in its busy creation of sham new values, and in its arteriosclerotic maintenance of time-worn old ones. Thus, to explore the full impact of the last line of Satire 1, we should understand it as a metaphor for Juvenal's art. The "ghosts" which are assailed in his poems are more than the dead of history; the list must also include haunting nostalgic memories of virtues and ideals which had really not had authentic life for well over a century.

The range and variety of Juvenal's exaggerations are truly impressive.

<sup>22</sup> Apparently this passage is modelled on Lucilius' Book 30. See J. G. Griffith, "The Ending of Juvenal's First Satire and Lucilius, Book XXX," *Hermes* 98 (1970), 56-72.

They cut across literary, rhetorical, philosophical, and mythological modes of expression, and thus it is unlikely that Juvenal's artistry can be reduced to any single one of them without doing violence to the total fabric of his poems' meaning. His exaggerations are best regarded as a special kind of satiric cognition, as one distinctive way of looking at the world in the satirist's distorted way. Exaggerations are a way of focusing attention on reality by seemingly removing us clearly from it. Thus, after expanding to a great length on certain ideas and obsessions, Juvenal reaches a point of self-evident unreality, which pops the whole illusion. By breaking through intellectual illusions, we may be led back to a disillusioned sense of reality. It is this satirical structure of two alternating moments which I have called the "Irony of Overstatement."

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